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A Standing Asymmetry Between Blame and Forgiveness*

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Abstract: Sometimes it is not one's place to blame or forgive. This phenomenon is captured under the philosophical notion of standing. However, there is an asymmetry to be explained here. One can successfully blame, even if one lacks the standing to do so. Yet, one cannot successfully forgive if one lacks the standing to do so. In this paper we explain this asymmetry. We argue that a complete explanation depends upon not only a difference in the natures of the standing to blame and forgive, but also a difference in the nature of blame and forgiveness themselves.

Keywords: blame; forgiveness; standing; rights; normative power

It's sometimes not our place to blame or forgive another person. Perhaps blame would be hypocritical, given our own wrongdoing and attitudes. Or maybe blaming the neighbor for overfeeding his obese cat would be none of our business. Perhaps we were not directly harmed by another's broken promise, so it's not our place to forgive them. Whatever the situation, this idea that it's not our place to blame or forgive is captured under the philosophical notion of *standing*. Even if someone is blameworthy, some individual may lack the standing to blame them. And even if someone is genuinely repentant, some individual may lack the standing to forgive them.

Two claims regarding standing have considerable currency, each within a different literature. The first claim concerns the standing to blame:

SB: One can successfully blame, even if one lacks the standing to do so.

SB is virtually undisputed in the literature on the standing to blame.¹ A ubiquitous tacit assumption, SB is entailed by the conjunction of claims found in nearly every paper on the topic: first, that something (e.g., hypocrisy, complicity, meddlesomeness) undermines the standing to blame. Second, that such blame is inappropriate, standingless, impermissible, etc. And, of course, inappropriate, standingless, or impermissible blame is still *blame*.²

SB is deeply intuitive, and is illustrated in everyday cases like the following:

Problematic Blame: Kimiko and Emeko have been married for years. One evening, Emeko asks Kimiko to bring him his phone. As she reaches for the phone, an incoming text message reveals that Emeko has been having an affair. Kimiko feels betrayed and asks Emeko to leave. Searching for a sympathetic ear, Emeko calls on his friend Zane. Emeko has kept his affair secret, but knows that Zane has also unapologetically cheated on his partner. To his surprise, however, when Emeko comes clean about the affair, Zane reproaches him. Emeko bristles angrily, responding, “Who the hell do you think you are? You cheated too, and never showed a shred of remorse. I don’t have to take this from *you*, of all people.”

Zane’s blame is hypocritical. Though Emeko deserves blame for the affair, Zane lacks the standing to blame him for it, given his own unapologetic infidelity.³ Nevertheless, Zane’s *standingless* blame is still *blame*.

A second claim concerns the standing to forgive:

SF: One cannot successfully forgive if one lacks the standing to do so.⁴

SF is also widely accepted in the forgiveness literature, being explicitly endorsed by a number of theorists.⁵ It is also implicitly accepted by authors who treat the standing to forgive interchangeably with the ability to forgive.⁶ As with SB, there is good reason for this; its truth is borne out by everyday experiences. Consider another illustrative case, which builds on

Problematic Blame:

Problematic "Forgiveness": After reflection and soul-searching, Emeko realizes he has made a terrible mistake. He tells Kimiko how sorry he is, vowing that the affair is over and he will never be unfaithful again. Yet Kimiko sadly tells him that she can't bring herself to forgive him for his betrayal. Devastated, Emeko heads to a bar to drown his sorrows. After several whiskeys, he loquaciously confesses everything to the bartender, including Kimiko's reluctance to forgive him. "You forgive me, right?" he pleads. "Please, tell me I'm forgiven and it's all okay." The bartender responds, "Of course, buddy. I forgive you."

The bartender's utterance cannot provide Emeko the relief he seeks. It's not the bartender's place to forgive Emeko for cheating on Kimiko, and he consequently lacks the ability to do so. The bartender likely knows this, yet even if he genuinely believed he could forgive Emeko, he would be mistaken. We recognize how absurd it would be for the bartender to take Emeko's hand and assure him he was forgiven. And this is just what we should expect, given SF.

SB and SF are both widely accepted, and ordinary cases illustrate their truth. Yet if SB and SF are true, there is a puzzling asymmetry here. There can be standingless blame, but not

standingless forgiveness. Call this claim *The Asymmetry*. We are not the first to recognize this asymmetry. Dana Nelkin writes,

[T]here is an interesting asymmetry between [blame and forgiveness]. Forgiveness seems to be something that only those who are wronged have the standing to do, whereas blame seems to be something anyone can do (whether they ought to or not). Suppose Avery gratuitously reveals a confidence of Pedro's. Pedro's friend might blame Avery and feel indignation, but only Pedro himself is in a position to forgive Avery. It seems it is not Pedro's friend's place to do so, and, as a result, he simply cannot forgive Avery.⁷

Despite acceptance of SB and SF, there is no obvious explanation for *why* both would be true. Philosophers have yet to explain *The Asymmetry*, but it cries out for explanation. After all, in key ways, the standing to blame and the standing to forgive are similar. Both, for instance, seem to involve some kind of authority, or being in the right position to respond to another's wrongdoing. Why, then, would they differ with respect to SB and SF? And what might this tell us about the nature of standing or the natures of forgiveness and blame? While there is currently no explanation for this puzzling phenomenon, in this paper, we remedy this omission. We begin by showing why, despite initial appearances, doing so is not a simple task.

1. Types of Standing

Luke Russell and Adam Piovarchy suggest that there are different *types* of standing in cases of blame and forgiveness: the standing to blame (which the hypocrite Zane lacks) is a kind of *moral* standing, while the standing to forgive (which the bartender lacks) is *metaphysical* standing.⁸ The former is a moral right or entitlement, while the latter is tied to *ability*. One might think that drawing this distinction takes the allure or mystery out of *The Asymmetry*: “standing” doesn't refer to just *one* thing that an agent might have with respect to blame or forgiveness, as

there are distinct phenomena at work in each case.

However, the substance of this distinction is largely an implicit acknowledgement of *The Asymmetry*, and an explanation requires more. Labeling one “moral standing” and the other “metaphysical standing” simply informs us that the former is what one needs to permissibly (or appropriately) blame, and the other is the one required for the ability to forgive. In order to do the explanatory work, we first need to know *how* the standing to blame and the standing to forgive are distinct things. And for this, we must explore the natures of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive.

Unfortunately, this is a more challenging task than it may initially appear. While the literatures on blame and forgiveness are replete with appeals to standing, there is only one explicit account of the standing to blame,⁹ and no sustained treatment concerning the nature of the standing to forgive.¹⁰ A detailed exploration of the nature of either of these is individually valuable in its own right, and can hopefully provide clarification for those who have thus far found discussion of standing in the literature too amorphous to be useful. Yet our aim extends further. Exploring in depth what the standing to blame and the standing to forgive *are* serves several purposes. First and foremost, we can better understand the key components of *The Asymmetry*. After all, if the goal is to explain why there’s a difference between two items, it’s important to properly understand those items. Second, such an exploration will help us better appreciate the parallels between the standing to blame and the standing to forgive, which can further motivate the need for an explanation for *The Asymmetry*. And finally, by comparing the natures of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive, we can look for differences that serve as the initial steps toward the explanation we seek. We begin with the standing to blame in Section 2, and then turn to the standing to forgive in Section 3.

2. The Standing to Blame

Although many writers appeal to the standing to blame, almost none have offered an analysis of standing itself. Instead, the literature is permeated with implicit assumptions and gestures at what it is in passing. As Matt King writes, standing in the blame literature is usually “cashed out in terms of rights, entitlements, authority, or jurisdiction.”¹¹ Sometimes, it is simply described as an amalgamation: “The general idea here is that there may be facts about the person who is expressing blame that make their blame inappropriate. It’s not their place, they aren’t well positioned, they don’t have the authority, and so on.¹² One might lack the standing to blame because one’s blame would be hypocritical,¹³ or because the blamer was complicit in the wrongdoing,¹⁴ or because blaming the wrongdoer is simply none of the blamer’s business—it would be meddlesome.¹⁵

While this amorphous understanding of the standing to blame might suffice in some contexts, here we need to be more precise. Since the standing to blame covers a wide swath, it can be difficult to agree on precisely what it *is* that one lacks in virtue of their hypocrisy, complicity, or meddlesomeness. While there is not unanimous agreement on what standing is, we will argue that the standing to blame either just is, or else is required for, the *right* to blame.¹⁶ If this is correct, it could be that the explanation for *The Asymmetry* is that the standing to forgive is not a right, or perhaps a different sort of right. To make the case that the standing to blame concerns a right, we first review some alternative descriptions of the standing to blame in the literature and see why they fail.

Some writers view standing to blame as an authority.¹⁷ For some, that authority is analogous to a legal jurisdiction.¹⁸ On this view, the standing to blame is akin to legal standing to

bring a lawsuit in court: “Just as only some have the requisite status to file suit and the right to have their case heard, so, too, is the class of individuals that may legitimately blame restricted.”¹⁹

There are two key problems with this view. First, while a third party may have the standing to blame, Marilyn Friedman claims that in legal contexts one may bring a suit only if one has been injured by the other party.²⁰ Suppose Kimiko tells her friend Mitsuko about Emeko’s infidelity. Mitsuko may well have the standing to blame Emeko on Kimiko’s behalf, even if Mitsuko has not been wronged or affected by Emeko’s wrongdoing at all. If the standing to blame were like legal standing, third party blame would be left out entirely.²¹ A related (though importantly distinct) problem concerns ability more generally. As we saw in *Problematic Blame*, Zane is still *able* to blame, even though he lacks the standing to blame due to his hypocrisy. The blame is, of course, inappropriate or untoward in some way, but it is nevertheless a successful instance of blaming.²² Yet those without legal standing simply *cannot* bring forth a legal suit. Given these disanalogies, the standing to blame should not be understood as analogous to legal standing.

Others view standing as authority, but not as akin to legal authority.²³ Raz clarifies that standing is a sort of authority that grants special permission to engage with the blamed individual.²⁴ But notably, the authority here is significant precisely because of the permission it grants. If this is correct, then any notion of authority or status that is weaker than the legal analogy is relevant because it grants the would-be blamer an entitlement or right. For instance, Coates and Tognazzini write,

One way that blame can be inappropriate is if the transgression is not within the would-be blamer’s *jurisdiction*, where this is understood in terms of the blamer’s moral standing, authority, or normative powers.... Chris is not *entitled* to blame Patrick, even if Patrick is blameworthy, because such blame would be hypocritical.²⁵

It's unclear whether we are meant to infer from this passage that having the standing to blame *just is* having some right, or rather an authority that *grants* one a right. Regardless, this directs us toward an exploration of rights to better elucidate the standing to blame.

A variety of theorists have written of the standing to blame itself as an entitlement or a right:

“Did he have the right, the requisite standing, to condemn the Palestinian terrorists, in the terms in which he did?”²⁶

“[W]e understand *R*'s moral standing to blame *S* for violations of *N* in terms of *R*'s having a certain (non-defeated) right to blame *S* for violations of *N*.”²⁷

“[I]t may be that I have the moral standing to express blame, but that, in the interests of others, and in the interests of avoiding even the appearance of impropriety, I should not exercise this right.”²⁸

Similar ideas connecting standing and rights are common.²⁹ This is an important result; the standing to blame is not akin to legal authority, but instead is related to a right. We are one step closer to understanding the nature of the standing to blame, and ultimately, finding an explanation for *The Asymmetry*. But if the standing to blame is (or is required for) a right, the key question is this: What *sort* of right?

On the standard Hohfeldian analysis, there are four types of rights.³⁰ *Privileges* are freedoms to act; *S* has a privilege to ϕ iff *S* has no duty not to ϕ .³¹ For example, a concealed carry permit in the US confers a privilege on its bearer. The individual with such a permit has no duty not to conceal the firearm they carry. *Claims* entail duties on others; *S* has a claim that *R* ϕ

iff R has a duty to S to ϕ . An individual who pays for a coffee has a claim that the barista serve him the coffee he ordered. The barista has a duty to the customer to provide the coffee in light of his payment. *Powers* can alter the rights or duties that an individual has. The governor of a state has the power to issue shelter-in-place orders, which restrict the rights to free movement citizens of the state would otherwise enjoy. Finally, *immunities* protect one's rights or duties from being altered by someone else. A tenured professor has the right to teach and research at her institution, and her tenure provides immunity. Her institution lacks the right (a power, in this case), to fire her.³² Put more sharply, then, our question is whether the standing to blame is (or is required for) a privilege, claim, power, or immunity (or perhaps a combination of some of these).

There is good reason to think that the right to blame is neither a claim nor an immunity. Blaming is something one *does*. In saying that one has the standing to blame, we are focused on the would-be blamer, the rights-holder, who can exercise this right. Yet this suggests that we're after an *active* right. And as Wenar writes, "Privilege-rights and power-rights are actively exercised.... Claim-rights and immunity-rights are passively enjoyed."³³

To elaborate, consider first the proposal that the standing to blame is (or is required for) a *claim-right*. If S has a claim-right that R ϕ , then R has a duty to S to ϕ . Thus, the content of S 's claim-right is the content of R 's duty, ϕ . Suppose, for example, that R is blameworthy for wronging S . Suppose further that S has the right to blame R for his wrongdoing. In this case, perhaps S has certain claim-rights on R . For instance, S may have a claim-right that R apologize to S , and therefore the content of this claim-right would be an apology from R . But this claim-right should not be confused with S 's right to blame R .

The reason why is that the right to blame concerns something that S does (or can do), not something owed to S by someone else. Since the content of S 's claim-right to R 's apology and

the content of *S*'s right to blame *R* are different, *S*'s right to blame *R* is distinct from *S*'s claim-right to *R*'s apology. Indeed, *whatever* claim-right *S* has on *R*, its content will be something that *R* does (or can do). So, *S*'s right to blame is not identical to any claim-right on *R*. Given that *S* and *R* are arbitrary agents, the reasoning here generalizes: no right to blame is identical to any claim-right. If the standing to blame is (or is required for) the right to blame, then it is not a claim-right.

Second, consider the proposal that the standing to forgive is (or is required for) an *immunity*. Recall that an immunity is a second-order right that protects its holder from the alteration of the holder's rights and duties. The example (offered above) of the tenured professor's right to teach distinguishes between the professor's first-order right to teach and the professor's second-order immunity that protects that right.³⁴ Now, perhaps those who have the right to blame *also* have an immunity that protects them against anyone removing or altering this right. But even if there is such an immunity, it is not identical to the right to blame. So, the standing to blame, as something actively exercised, is connected to either a privilege or a power.

Privilege-rights seem like the right candidate for standing. If *S* has a privilege to blame, that means *S* has no obligation not to blame. This fits well with how standing is typically understood. Supposing that Kimiko has been faithful, she has no obligation not to blame Emeko. But in *Problematic Blame*, Zane seems to have an obligation not to blame Emeko in virtue of Zane's hypocrisy.³⁵ Additionally, privilege-rights seem capable of doing the work that standing to blame needs to do. One can have the standing to blame another overtly, but standing also seems to apply privately. There would be something untoward even in Zane's *private* blame of Emeko, given Zane's hypocrisy. This makes sense of the fact that one can have the privilege to overtly blame or to privately blame. And just as one can have the standing to blame the

wrongdoer directly or to blame the wrongdoer to third parties, one can have the privilege to blame in a directed or non-directed way. Finally, if standing is (or is required for) a privilege-right, this can make some sense of why there is so little explicit discussion about standing in the literature. As King writes, “[A]s a privilege, we might *expect* there to be little discussion of when blamers possess the requisite standing, because there will be no objection in such cases. With no violated duty present, such blamers can blame freely.”³⁶

Nevertheless, King raises several concerns for the proposal that the standing to blame is (or is required for) a privilege-right. First, King writes that privileges are best applied in situations where the conduct in question is generally prohibited, yet blaming a wrongdoer is not something from which we are generally prohibited.³⁷ King’s concern is that it is otiose to claim the standing to blame is a privilege when we aren’t generally prohibited from blaming wrongdoers. It would be akin to asserting one’s privilege to make a peanut butter sandwich for lunch. One isn’t generally prohibited from doing so, so claiming a privilege seems almost silly.

In response, notice that some paradigmatic rights are privileges, and they don’t concern actions which we are generally prohibited from doing. For example, it is uncontroversial that individuals have the right to speak their mind, and yet this is not something they are generally prohibited from doing (at least in liberal democracies). Additionally, what might sound odd about saying that we have privileges to do things that are generally permissible is simply that we usually don’t have to *assert* such a privilege. The privilege is taken as obvious. We don’t need to assert that we have the right to make a sandwich or speak our minds. Yet these are clearly things that we generally have the right to do, and they would be privileges. Consequently, we don’t see this concern that King raises as a significant worry.

King's second concern is more challenging. While we have focused mainly on hypocritical blame, the standing to blame is relevant in a broader range of cases. Those who would be hypocritical in their blame lack the standing to blame, but so do those whose blame would be meddlesome. A coworker may unfairly chastise her child at a work function, but if an acquaintance were to blame her for being a bit too harsh in her parenting, she might rightly respond that her coworker should mind their business. In so doing, she is suggesting the coworker, a mere acquaintance, lacks the standing to blame her.³⁸ The problem, as King sees it, is that the way in which standing pertains to meddlesome and hypocritical blame isn't parallel:

In meddlesome cases, the idea is that most people lack the standing to blame and only some (e.g., friends or wronged parties) can legitimately blame. For meddlesome blame, then, we might plausibly treat the standing to blame as a privilege belonging only to those few. But now consider hypocritical blame. In such cases, the idea is that most *have* the requisite standing; it is only hypocrites who do not. It's hard to see how appealing to privilege is helpful in explaining what's wrong with hypocritical blame, since there seems to be no general duty not to blame to which having the privilege could count as an exception.³⁹

In the case of meddlesome blame, King contends, most people lack the privilege to blame. Only those with the right relationship *have* the privilege. In the case of hypocritical blame, however, most people have the privilege to blame. Only those who are hypocritical *lack* the privilege. So if standing to blame is (or is required for) a privilege-right, it seems there's no way to explain both meddlesome and hypocritical blame as fitting under the umbrella of standing.

This is an important challenge that we cannot fully address here. But we can offer a tentative reply. Everyone has the *right* to blame, but in certain cases this right is *defeated*.⁴⁰ For instance, the would-be hypocritical blamer's right to blame is defeated by the fact that she implicitly rejects the equality of persons, which grounds the right to blame.⁴¹ Perhaps when it

comes to meddlesome blame, one's right to blame is defeated by countervailing considerations, such as privacy. On this proposal, everyone has the right to blame generally, but in cases of hypocritical or meddlesome blame, this very same right can be defeated by certain considerations. This picture allows that both hypocritical and meddlesome blame fall under the umbrella of standing and can be treated in parallel fashion. While more must be said to flesh out this proposal, the point here is that there are avenues to explore before dismissing the standing to blame as (or as required for) a privilege-right.⁴²

In sum, neither of King's concerns are conclusive in demonstrating that the standing to blame is not (or is not required for) a privilege-right. Provided that there is such a thing as the standing to blame, it is promising to interpret it as (or as required for) a privilege-right.

We have not, however, addressed power-rights. And in fact, some theorists writing on the standing to blame have argued that it should, at least partly, be understood as a normative power.⁴³ While we have focused on the right to blame as a first-order right, this proposal shifts our focus to the possibility that the right to blame is a second-order right, the exercise of which can alter others' rights. On this picture, if *S* has a power-right to blame *R*, then *S* can alter *R*'s rights or obligations *by blaming R*. What kinds of alterations are at issue?

There are a variety of possible answers to this question. In blaming, one might create an obligation for the agent blamed to make amends or apologize. This captures Edwards's claim that the standing to blame requires the power to put another under a duty to offer a fitting, content-sensitive reply by way of one's blame.⁴⁴ By blaming, one creates an obligation for the blamed agent that she reply to that blame in a fitting way, perhaps by explaining why she did what she did, or by reconciling herself to the blamer.⁴⁵ To illustrate, Kimiko has the standing to blame Emeko for infidelity. Through her blame, Kimiko may create an obligation that Emeko

make amends, thereby restricting what Emeko has a right to do. If Kimiko lacked such standing due to hypocrisy, for instance, she could not create an obligation that Emeko make amends through her blame.

Nevertheless, the standing to blame cannot *solely* be a power, as Edwards acknowledges. Edwards sees standing as involving *both* a privilege and a power.⁴⁶ There is good reason for this. Edwards is focused on directed blame, or blame that is expressed and directed toward the individual blamed.⁴⁷ But as we have seen, standing is broader than this. One can lack the standing to blame even privately or to a third party.⁴⁸ In such cases, the offender might be unaware of the blame. If so, it's implausible that the blame imposes obligations on her. Thus, the standing to blame can be understood as (or as required for) a privilege-right in all cases of blame, whether private, overt, directed, or non-directed. But it might *also* be understood as (or as required for) a power-right in cases of directed, overt blame where the individual wronged blames the wrongdoer, thereby creating certain obligations for her.

Notably, King quickly rejects the notion that the right to blame would involve a power, stating that blaming does not alter the wrongdoer's obligations: "If [blameworthy individuals] have duties to apologize or make amends, such duties plausibly arise from being blameworthy (or having acted wrongly), not from someone's specific blame."⁴⁹ Yet King's dismissal is too quick. He is right that in paradigmatic cases, a wrongdoer has duties to apologize and make amends simply in virtue of being blameworthy. But it remains possible that, in blaming, the blamer creates an obligation that the wrongdoer explain herself to the blamer. Or, perhaps the blame provides *additional* reasons for the blamed to apologize, even if she has the same obligations to apologize.⁵⁰ In blaming, one may generate a *pro tanto* obligation—even if it's a *pro tanto* obligation that's *already* grounded in something else, such as the individual's

blameworthiness. King does not entertain these possibilities, and thus dismisses power-rights too hastily.

After a rather arduous exploration into the standing to blame, we can now appreciate the fruits of our labor. Although there is no consensus on the nature of the standing to blame, it is plausibly either a status or authority that confers certain rights, or else it is simply a right itself. In either case, it is important to clarify what type of right the standing to blame would be (or confer). The two promising candidates are a privilege, or else a privilege and a power. Now we must explore the nature of the standing to forgive to see how it compares with the standing to blame, so understood—and to see if this comparison helps explain *The Asymmetry*.

3. The Standing to Forgive

As with the standing to blame, the standing to forgive is couched in varied terminology, and there is little by way of explicit analysis of the concept.⁵¹ Like the standing to blame, the standing to forgive has been expressed by some in terms of rights, and by others in terms of an authority.⁵²

In parallel with our treatment of the standing to blame, we will argue that the standing to forgive either just is, or is required for, the *right* to forgive. Perhaps the most obvious reason for this is that theorists often use the language of rights when discussing the standing to forgive. Furthermore, a review of the literature reveals that, even where the standing to forgive isn't explicitly discussed in terms of rights, the terminology that is used (and its context) is best understood in terms of rights. As we will explain, the relevant type of right depends upon an important observation about what forgiveness can accomplish.

Jeffrie Murphy, perhaps the first author that discusses the standing to forgive, writes: “To use a legal term, I do not have *standing* to resent or forgive you unless I have myself been the victim of your wrongdoing.”⁵³ Since Murphy borrows the term “standing” from the law, there is reason to think there is at least some important analogy.⁵⁴ If so, then there is an important *disanalogy* between the standing to forgive and standing to blame (see n. 67). Nevertheless, Murphy thinks of the standing to forgive as a right: “Just as I have a right to choose within limits to whom I will be benevolent ... so too do I have a right to choose which of all ‘deserving’ persons I shall forgive.”⁵⁵ A number of theorists in the forgiveness literature follow Murphy in articulating the standing to forgive in terms of rights.⁵⁶

As in the standing to blame literature, other theorists articulate the standing to forgive in terms of *authority*.⁵⁷ Christopher Bennett writes, “The victim has authority over these directed obligations and can waive them if they choose to do so; this is the kernel of truth in the idea that the victim has a special standing to forgive that other parties do not have.”⁵⁸ These authors clearly are interested in *normative* authority, as indicated by talk of obligations and relationship norms. Presumably, if the standing to forgive is an authority of this sort, it might better be understood as a *status* that *grants* one a right rather than a right itself.⁵⁹ Thus, as we saw in the standing to blame literature, the standing to forgive seems to either be a right itself, or else a status or authority that grants one a right. Either way, this points us again to the question of rights. Thus far the standing to forgive and the standing to blame appear fairly similar, so we do not yet have an explanation for *The Asymmetry*. Yet if the standing to forgive is (or is required for) the right to forgive, we still must examine which type of right is relevant. Perhaps exploring this will deliver an explanation for *The Asymmetry*. As with the standing to blame, we consider four proposals corresponding to four types of rights.

First, consider the proposal that the standing to forgive is (or is required for) a *claim-right*. Notably, the reasoning we offer above as to why the standing to blame is not a claim-right applies, *mutatis mutandis*, here. If *S* has a claim-right that *R* ϕ , then *R* has a duty to *S* to ϕ . And, again, the content of *S*'s claim-right, ϕ , is something that *R* does (or can do). But, the content of *S*'s right to forgive is something that *S* does (or can do), namely, forgive. So, even if *S* has a claim-right on *R* (e.g., to apologize, to make amends, etc.), its content will be distinct from the content of *S*'s right to forgive, and thus *S*'s right to forgive is not identical to any claim-right that *S* has on *R*.

Second, the reasoning we offer above as to why the standing to blame is not an immunity right also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, here. An immunity is a second-order right that protects its holder from the alteration of the holder's rights and duties. But, even if those who have the right to forgive *also* have an immunity that protects them against anyone removing or altering this right, this immunity is not identical to the right that it protects (i.e., the right to forgive).

These arguments highlight that, as with blame, forgiveness is something someone *does*. Like the right to blame, the right to forgive is an active right—a right that is *exercised*. However, claims and immunities are passive rights. Thus, if the standing to forgive is (or is required for) the right to forgive, then the relevant right is either a privilege or a power.

Consider, then, the third proposal, according to which the standing to forgive is (or is required for) a *privilege-right*. If *S* has the privilege to forgive *R*, then *S* has no duty not to forgive *R*. Although this proposal is not as easily dismissed as the previous two, it nevertheless fails to do justice to the usage and function of standing in the forgiveness literature. Privilege-rights concern *permissibility*. Yet throughout the forgiveness literature, the standing or right to forgive is treated as necessary for the *ability* to forgive (or perhaps more carefully, the ability to

accomplish forgiveness by engaging in certain activities).⁶⁰ A brief survey of the literature supports this connection between standing to forgive and ability.

When discussing the idea of third-party forgiveness, Piers Benn writes:

If I am ‘unable’ to forgive in such circumstances, what sort of inability is this? Is it really that I *ought* not to offer forgiveness—that to do so is an impertinence? Or is it, perhaps, that I literally *cannot* offer it, that the attempt to offer it reveals a basic conceptual confusion about the very nature of forgiveness? Both these ideas contain an important truth. For there seems to be a peculiarly close link between the entitlement to forgive and the ability to forgive...The essential point is that forgiveness can be conferred only by someone who is entitled to forgive.⁶¹

In a similar vein, Paul Hughes treats the standing to forgive as being tied to the ability to do so:

In addition to the idea that interpersonal forgiveness involves a process in which the victim of wrong forswears resentment for morally appropriate reasons, other key elements of it include, explicitly or by implication, that only the victim *can* forgive the wrongdoer, which I shall refer to as the “standing” requirement....⁶²

Brandon Warmke also reinforces the observation that authors writing on forgiveness generally tie the standing to forgive to the ability to do so, helpfully contrasting this with the way that standing is understood in the literature on blame:

To say that one lacks standing to blame is not to say that one does not have the power to blame. Rather, it is to say that were one to blame, one’s blame would be morally impermissible or inappropriate. *When we claim that someone lacks standing to forgive, however, we mean that she cannot forgive.*⁶³

Not only is this idea expressed explicitly in the forgiveness literature, it is also *implicitly* assumed by authors writing on forgiveness. Glen Pettigrove treats the standing to forgive interchangeably with having the ability to do so.⁶⁴ While Pettigrove’s thesis is that third parties sometimes have the standing to forgive, his thesis is articulated in the language of *ability*:

“persons other than victims *can* forgive.”⁶⁵ Notably, Pettigrove cites over a dozen articles as committed to the contrary view that only victims have the standing to forgive. However, while the authors of those articles commit themselves to the view that only victims *can* or are *able* to forgive (or that forgiveness is *possible* only for victims), many never mention the term ‘standing’.⁶⁶ This is noteworthy, *not* because Pettigrove has mistakenly attributed this view to these authors, but rather because it highlights the tacit (though reasonable) assumption that authors writing on forgiveness generally accept that the standing to forgive and the ability to forgive go hand in hand.⁶⁷

With this in mind, let’s return to the proposal that the standing to blame is (or is required for) a privilege-right. Recall that a privilege-right to ϕ concerns the *permissibility* of ϕ -ing, *not* the ability to ϕ . If we have no right to tell someone else how to live their life, for example, this certainly does not imply that we lack the *ability* to do so. Rather, it implies that (all else equal) we ought not exercise this ability. Therefore, since the standing to forgive is required for the ability to do so, the standing to forgive cannot be (or be required for) a privilege-right.

The remaining alternative is that the standing to forgive is (or is required for) a *power*. While one might rest content with this proposal simply because it results from the foregoing process of elimination, there are further, positive reasons to think that the standing to forgive involves a normative power. Warmke and Bennett explicitly identify the standing to blame as (or as required for) a normative power.⁶⁸ For instance, Warmke writes, “To say that someone has standing to forgive is to say that they have the power to forgive.”⁶⁹ Central to this view is the observation that forgiveness transforms the normative landscape. Warmke captures this in what he calls the “Post-Forgiveness Fact”:

(PFF): Paradigmatic cases of forgiving alter the norms of interaction for both the victim and the wrongdoer in certain characteristic ways.⁷⁰

Warmke expands upon this idea: “In forgiving, we relinquish certain rights (for example, to blame) and we release others from certain personal obligations (for example, to further apology or restitution).”⁷¹ Furthermore, the alteration of the normative landscape is the result of a normative power: “the manner in which forgivers alter the relevant norms may fruitfully be thought of as an exercise of a normative power.”⁷² Warmke ties this normative power to the *standing* to forgive: In exerting declarative force...someone with the appropriate standing can make it the case that a wrongdoer is forgiven.⁷³

In a similar manner, Bennett defends the “Alteration Thesis,” which states that “forgiveness alters the normative situation created by wrongdoing.”⁷⁴ Bennett explains this in more detail:

[F]orgiveness as a normative power involves (1) either cancelling some of the wrongdoer’s secondary obligations (through the exercise of a normative power) or acknowledging that secondary obligations have been discharged (where acknowledgement does not in itself require any exercise of normative power) and (2) exercising a normative power to undertake an obligation to treat the wrongdoer (in action, but also perhaps in feeling and perception), as one who no longer stands under those cancelled or discharged obligations (or at least to work toward such attitudes and perceptions).⁷⁵

Notably, Bennett’s (1) and (2) correspond to Warmke’s claims concerning the alteration of *wrongdoer norms* and *victim norms*. Like Warmke and Bennett, Alice MacLachlan develops the idea that forgiveness is the exercise of a “moral power.” As she puts it, “victims have the power to release perpetrators from burdens of guilt and moral obligations, by uttering words of forgiveness.”⁷⁶ Lastly, Priest argues that a victim has the “authority” to make third-party blame inapt, an authority most plausibly identified as (or as required for) a normative power.⁷⁷

Although most theorists do not explicitly articulate the standing to forgive in terms of a normative power (indeed, most don’t explicitly say much *at all* about what standing is), the idea

that forgiveness results in norm alteration is commonplace. Paul Twambley writes that, when wronged by another, “[y]ou are within your right to resent his action. In forgiving him, you relinquish that right, you readjust your relationship to one of equality.”⁷⁸ Warmke also draws attention to Dana Nelkin’s suggestion that “forgiveness can involve the release of a special kind of personal obligation that the wrongdoer has to her victim.”⁷⁹

If forgiveness, at least in paradigmatic cases, results in the alteration of moral norms, and if the standing to forgive is required for the ability to accomplish these norm alterations, then the correct account of the standing to forgive must explain this fact. Given that a normative power is a right the exercise of which alters rights or obligations, the proposal that in paradigmatic cases the standing to forgive is (or is required for) a normative power offers the best explanation.

Our exploration of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive has yielded a clearer grasp on each, while highlighting their many similarities and few key differences. With this in hand, we turn once again to our search for an explanation of *The Asymmetry*.

4. A Tempting Explanation: Different Types of Rights

Let’s pause to take stock. We encountered *The Asymmetry*: there can be standingless blame but not standingless forgiveness. In search of an explanation, we pursued a thorough exploration into the natures of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive with the hope that these natures, when compared, might provide the explanation we seek. We argued that while both kinds of standing are (or are required for) a right, there is a difference in the type of right associated with each.

Although our primary goal is to explain the *The Asymmetry*, a more thorough treatment of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive is itself valuable. As the literatures on

standing have continued to grow, surprisingly little has been done to clarify the notions underlying them. The standing to blame literature has largely focused on offering explanations for why hypocrisy undermines the standing to blame.⁸⁰ Some authors have recognized the importance of getting clear on what hypocrisy is: what exactly is it that's *undermining* standing in these cases?⁸¹ But it would seem equally important to clarify what standing is: what exactly is it that's *being undermined*? Our search arrived at an answer: the standing to blame is most plausibly understood as (or as required for) a privilege-right (and sometimes a power). Furthermore, our exploration also provides principled reasons to rule out alternative answers that either neglect the centrality of rights or else fail to identify the correct type of right(s) at issue.

While some writing in the literature on forgiveness have persuasively tied the standing to forgive to a normative power,⁸² a sustained argument for this position has been lacking. Our exploration offers further vindication for this position. The notion of a normative power fits best with the language of ability so often associated with the standing to forgive, and also fills the conceptual role that ubiquitous appeals to standing in the literature require. Lastly, our exploration eliminates competing notions of the standing to forgive that fail to satisfy the language of and appeals to standing in the literature.

Individually, our explorations of the standing to blame and the standing to forgive yield important results: the standing to forgive involves a power, but the standing to blame needn't involve a power; it can simply be a privilege. Does this difference explain *The Asymmetry*? There's some reason to think it's a promising explanation. As Warmke writes, when it occurs, "forgiveness alters the norms of interaction between the victim and the wrongdoer."⁸³ But these norms are altered precisely because the forgiver has the normative power to do so. When

someone lacks the authority or power to forgive, then they cannot accomplish these alterations, and thus don't succeed in forgiving.

To illustrate, imagine two agents who seem to be engaging in the same activity toward some wrongdoer. Each of them engages in paradigmatic activities associated with forgiveness, overcoming resentment toward the wrongdoer,⁸⁴ committing to not seek revenge,⁸⁵ uttering "I forgive you," and so on. Now suppose that only the first has the standing to forgive. If so, then whatever it is that the second agent is engaged in, it falls short of forgiveness.⁸⁶

In contrast, consider a hypocrite who lacks the standing to blame. The hypocrite can still *blame*—albeit impermissibly or inappropriately.⁸⁷ And our exploration of standing would seem to provide the explanation: the standing to blame doesn't essentially involve a normative power to alter the norms between the blamer and the agent blamed. The standing to blame is always at least a privilege, which means it concerns the (*pro tanto*) permissibility or appropriateness of blame. Accordingly, to lack the standing to blame is not to lack the ability to do so. At most, lacking the standing to blame makes one's blame (*pro tanto*) morally impermissible or inappropriate. But of course, one can successfully blame even without permission.

Though this is a tempting explanation of *The Asymmetry*, it does not account for all the relevant phenomena. The problem is that the standingless blamer is still *able* to blame even in cases in which the standing to blame involves a power. Recall that if Edwards is correct, the standing to blame may sometimes also involve a power. Suppose this is true. In fact, suppose for the moment that the standing to blame *always* involves a power. That is, every time someone with standing blames, one imposes certain obligations on others and alters their rights—perhaps every time one blames, one creates obligations that the wrongdoer apologize, make amends, or explain herself. Even on *this* view, individuals without standing to blame are still able to blame.⁸⁸

For example, suppose that Kimiko was similarly unfaithful to Emeko. Hypocritical Kimiko could engage in all of the standard activities of blame, feeling resentment and reproaching Emeko, etc., and thus plausibly *blame*. She would simply fail to impose any obligations on Emeko in doing so. Of course, Emeko's blameworthiness may provide a reason to apologize to Kimiko, but he needn't take *Kimiko's* blame as a reason to do so.⁸⁹

Although the fact that the standing to forgive is a power explains why there cannot be standingless forgiveness, we haven't yet explained why there can be standingless blame. We have only accounted for half of *The Asymmetry*. One can successfully blame without the standing to do so whether that standing is understood as (or as required for) a privilege, a power, or both. If one can successfully blame regardless of whether the standing to blame is (or is required for) a different type of right than the standing to forgive, then distinguishing between types of rights cannot fully explain *The Asymmetry*.

Despite having come this far, we must go further still. What initially seemed a promising explanation must be augmented with something deeper. In the following section we finally uncover an explanation of why there can be standingless blame, an explanation that also enriches our understanding of why there can't be standingless forgiveness.

5. A Deeper Explanation: The Fulfillment of Normative Functions

Given that the exploration into the natures of the standing to forgive and blame does not fully explain *The Asymmetry*, we now look deeper, turning to the natures of forgiveness and blame themselves. In particular, we look to *functions* of blame and forgiveness. A *function* is an end that a thing or activity naturally aims at. One function of teaching, for example, is to communicate knowledge or understanding. This is a non-normative function. But there are also

normative functions. A normative function is a function instantiated by the creation, preservation, or alteration of some norm. One normative function of a command, for example, is to create an obligation for the person(s) at whom the command is directed.⁹⁰

Blame and forgiveness each have various *non-normative functions*: there are certain ends at which they naturally aim (but which are not instantiated by the creation, preservation, or alteration of some norm). Matthew Talbert writes that “[a]n important function of blame is to demand that wrongdoers admit their errors, feel regret, vow to refrain from similar behavior in the future, and so forth.”⁹¹ Blame can also function as a way for the victim to stand up against and protest the offensive judgments implicit in the wrongdoer’s conduct (e.g., that one deserves to be treated better, that one’s interests matter, etc.).⁹² Similarly, Angela Smith maintains that blame has two central aims: registering the fact that the person wronged didn’t deserve such treatment, and prompting moral acknowledgment from the blameworthy agent or the wider moral community.⁹³ Additionally, Coleen Macnamara argues that the reactive emotions involved in blaming have the function of “eliciting sincere acknowledgement of fault from the wrongdoer.”⁹⁴

Having a wrongdoer feel remorse, apologize, admit his fault, make amends, etc. are non-normative functions. As we discussed above, however, blame may also serve normative functions: placing a *pro tanto obligation* on the wrongdoer to apologize, admit his fault, make amends, etc.⁹⁵

In some cases, blame fails to serve its non-normative functions: the wrongdoer may deny wrongdoing or stubbornly persist in disregarding the interests of the agent he has wronged. But our exploration of the nature of the standing to blame now pays dividends, since it reveals that blame can also fail to fulfill its normative functions. Recall that in section 2 we argued that the

standing to blame is (or is required for) a right. Sometimes this right is a power, and the blamer can create certain obligations for the blamed by blaming. For example, by blaming, one may impose an obligation that the blamed apologize or make amends. As we saw in section 4, however, even in cases where the standing to blame is understood as (required for) a power-right, one is nevertheless *able* to blame without having that right. One simply fails to create any additional obligations on the wrongdoer. And this is just to say that blame can fail to fulfill its normative functions. To illustrate, hypocritical blame plausibly fails to place any additional obligation on the wrongdoer. While the wrongdoer plausibly *already* has obligations to apologize, etc., hypocritical or meddling blame fail to provide any *additional* reason to do so that the wrongdoer must acknowledge.⁹⁶ But, again, virtually no one doubts that what are called hypocritical blame and meddling blame are instances of *blame*. Not only are they instances of blame; they are, in a way, *paradigmatic* (albeit perhaps inappropriate) instances of blame. So, blame that fails to fulfill its normative functions is still blame.

Compare these reflections on blame to forgiveness, which also has normative and non-normative functions. Forgiveness often functions to restore or repair relationships. As Robert Roberts writes, “the teleology of forgiveness is reconciliation.”⁹⁷ This can involve both normative and non-normative functions (some of which can occur without the full restoration of relationships). Some non-normative functions include the overcoming of resentment and other hostile attitudes,⁹⁸ the cessation of seeking out revenge,⁹⁹ or development of good will toward the wrongdoer.¹⁰⁰ Forgiveness may also have the non-normative therapeutic functions of freeing both victims of their anger and wrongdoers of anger directed at them, allowing both to move forward with their lives.¹⁰¹

As we have seen, forgiveness also serves normative functions. Forgiveness paradigmatically accomplishes these normative functions through certain kinds of speech-acts.¹⁰² Some speech acts serve as “commissives” that, when uttered, function to commit the speaker to the fulfilment of certain obligations (e.g., expressions of promises). Other speech acts serve as “declaratives” that, when uttered by someone with the relevant authority, can alter facts about the world: “Much like one can declare a debt forgiven (or a criminal pardoned), one can declare that one has been forgiven by sincerely saying something like ‘I forgive you’.”¹⁰³ Other related non-verbal “performative” acts (e.g., a gesture, or perhaps an embrace) may have similar normative effects.¹⁰⁴

Through performative acts, forgiveness can function to *relinquish* certain rights that the victim has with respect to the wrongdoer: the right to blame, to request an apology, to demand restitution,¹⁰⁵ and perhaps the right to feel resentment.¹⁰⁶ In turn, this may involve *releasing* the wrongdoer from or *waiving* corresponding obligations.¹⁰⁷ Dana Nelkin writes that “forgiveness is constituted (at least in part) by a special kind of release from a special kind of obligation the offender has to the victim,” such as “apology, sincere remorse, penance or related phenomena.”¹⁰⁸ Forgiveness can also function to *commit* the forgiver to certain obligations. As Bennett writes, the forgiver “enters into a commitment to the wrongdoer no longer to treat him as standing under those obligations” (e.g., obligations to apologize, to make restitution), and to “treat the wrongdoer differently and work toward changing one’s heart toward them.”¹⁰⁹

Can forgiveness fail to fulfill its normative functions and still be *forgiveness*? Not in paradigmatic cases. Our exploration of the standing to forgive in section 3 has already set the stage to offer an explanation of *why* this is—the pieces are already in place. We’ve argued that the standing to forgive is (or is required for) a normative power. This best explains the consistent

treatment of the standing to forgive as being tied to the ability to do so, along with the role that forgiveness paradigmatically plays in interpersonal relationships. This in turn indicates that the standing to forgive is required to accomplish something that takes place in forgiveness, namely, the normative transformations that are essential to forgiveness itself.

To illustrate this point, return once more to Kimiko and Emeko:

Non-functional "Forgiveness": Suppose that after his encounter with Zane, wherein Emeko was hypocritically blamed for his affair, the friends had a falling out. Emeko turned instead to his friend Rayne, who helped him begin the important work of trying to make amends with Kimiko. Several months later, Emeko calls Rayne, excited to share the news that Kimiko has graciously forgiven him for his infidelity. Rayne eagerly asks how the relationship is going. Yet Emeko reports some disturbing details: Kimiko said she forgives him, but every morning she insists that Emeko apologize again for the affair, and she is still cold and distant many months after first discovering the affair. Rayne, confused, tells Emeko that it doesn't sound like Kimiko has actually forgiven him at all.

Rayne is right. If Kimiko had truly forgiven Emeko, we would expect some telltale changes in their relationship. Although Kimiko might still struggle with resentment, we would expect the resentment to be reduced, and (perhaps) to eventually end. At the very least, Kimiko would no longer be vindictive, holding Emeko's betrayal over his head. We would expect the relationship to be in the process of repair and restoration, not what Emeko describes.¹¹⁰

More importantly for our purposes, we would also expect a transformed *normative* situation between Kimiko and Emeko. If Kimiko has truly forgiven Emeko, it's no longer appropriate for her to nurse resentment and demand that Emeko apologize. In forgiving, she has

forfeited the right to chastise Emeko for the affair, and Emeko is no longer bound by his previous obligations to apologize and make restitution.¹¹¹

This reveals that, even if Kimiko has told Emeko that she forgives him, one of two things must be true: Either Kimiko is mistaken about the normative situation that now governs the relationship, or else she simply hasn't genuinely forgiven Emeko. Our explanation reveals why: forgiveness, at least in paradigmatic cases, requires that (at least some of) its normative functions be fulfilled.

We have finally found our explanation for *The Asymmetry*. Even if the standing to blame is (required for) a privilege-right and the standing to forgive is (required for) a normative power, this difference cannot explain *both* why there is standingless blame and why there is not standingless forgiveness. The deeper, complete explanation lies in the nature and functions of forgiveness and blame. While blame does not require the fulfillment of its normative functions, forgiveness does.¹¹² The standing to forgive, which is best understood as (requiring) a normative power, is necessary for the fulfillment of these normative functions. The result is that there can be standingless blame but not standingless forgiveness.

Even with this explanation in hand, one might press further: Why is it that forgiveness requires the fulfillment of its normative functions when blame does not? Perhaps the answer is simply that otherwise it wouldn't be forgiveness. Reflection on paradigmatic cases as they arise in our interpersonal practices and on the arguments of theorists we have discussed bolster this idea. Explanations can only go so far, and perhaps we have reached bedrock. This answer to the question settles on what we recognize forgiveness to be as it functions in actual interpersonal practices. In light of P.F. Strawson's focus on these practices, one might call this the *Strawsonian Position*.¹¹³

Or perhaps there's a further story to be told: maybe forgiveness is what it is because *we need it* to be. Indeed, what other recourse would there be for reconciliation, for the release from debt and obligation, or for letting go of rights we hold over one another? In light of wrongdoing, how could we wipe the normative slate clean if there weren't something the exercise of which could accomplish this? These normative transformations seem to be necessary for the repair and reconciliation of interpersonal relationships that have been damaged or interrupted by wrongdoing. Broken relationships *may* still move on without repair, but only at the cost of being less than they were. Insofar as these normative transformations are essential to the flourishing of interpersonal relationships, we need an activity that can bring about these transformations. The activity of forgiveness, then, provides an assurance that these have occurred. This answer reaches further than the previous one, understanding forgiveness as a practice that satisfies a human need or aspiration. Accordingly, one might call this the *Aspirational Position*.

Reflection upon the Aspirational Position naturally leads one to ask why *blame*, on the other hand, *need not* fulfill its normative functions. One possibility is that the normative functions that blame can fulfill (e.g., creating obligations or reasons to apologize, answer for one's actions, etc.) don't significantly alter the normative situation that is *already* in place in virtue of blameworthiness for wrongdoing. And so, perhaps there is less need for blame to accomplish its normative functions in order to be what it is.

6. Conclusion

We began with a question: Why can there be standingless blame, but not standingless forgiveness? The explanation is not merely that the standing to forgive is always (or always required for) a normative power, whereas the standing to blame is not. Instead, the answer is that

forgiveness, by its very nature, requires the fulfillment of at least some of its normative functions, and blame does not. As Benn observes, “there seems to be a peculiarly close link between the entitlement to forgive and the ability to forgive, which marks an interesting difference between the activity of forgiving, and other activities which may mistakenly be thought analogous to it.”¹¹⁴ Yet no such close link exists when it comes to blame.

If we are correct, then this points the way for future research on the standing to blame and the standing to forgive. Perhaps surprisingly, such research might be most fruitful when focused not on the nature of the rights that constitute standing, but on the natures and functions of blame and forgiveness themselves.

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¹ One exception is Ivan Milic, who writes, “In order to perform blaming, the speaker arguably needs to satisfy the condition of Non-Hypocrisy.” See Ivan Milic, “Hypocritical Blame: A Question for the Normative Accounts of Assertion,” *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1543-9, 1547. However, Milic’s claim is at odds with common sense and our social practices of blame (see n. 22 for further discussion).

² G. A. Cohen, “Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 58 (2006): 113-26; R. Jay Wallace, “Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38 (2010): 307-41; Marilyn Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 47 (2013): 271-84; Amy McKiernan, “Standing Conditions and Blame,” *Southwest Philosophy Review* 32 (2016): 145-51; Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99 (2018): 118-39; Cristina Roadevin, “Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing,” *Metaphilosophy* 49 (2018): 137-52; Benjamin Rossi, “The Commitment Account of Hypocrisy,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 21 (2018): 553-67; Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller, “When Hypocrisy Undermines the Standing to Blame: A Response to Rossi,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22 (2019): 379-84; Kyle G. Fritz and Daniel J. Miller, “The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame,” *Ergo* 6 (2019): 545-69; Patrick Todd, “A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame,” *Nous* 53 (2019): 347-74; Maria Seim, “The Standing to Blame and Meddling,” *Teorema* 38 (2019): 7-26.

³ Many theorists agree that being hypocritical with respect to some fault undermines one's standing to blame others (Cohen, "Casting the First Stone"; Wallace, "Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons"; Fritz and Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame"; Fritz and Miller, "When Hypocrisy Undermines the Standing to Blame"; Fritz and Miller, "The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame"; Roadevin, "Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing"; Todd, "A Unified Account").

⁴ We restrict SF to *paradigmatic* cases of forgiveness, which we understand as having the features laid out by Brandon Warmke: "forgiveness is often a communicative activity that responds to apologies and to requests for forgiveness," "forgiveness often functions to let wrongdoers know how they can reasonably expect to be treated by their victim," and "forgiveness characteristically alters the norms between victims and wrongdoers" (see Brandon Warmke, "The Normative Significance of Forgiveness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94 [2016]: 687-703, 691). Cases of privately forgiving those who are distant or dead, for example, would not be paradigmatic in this sense. Rather than arbitrary or merely stipulative, such features are central to our thinking about how forgiveness functions and what it accomplishes. The method of approaching forgiveness via focusing on paradigmatic cases with such features is defended by Brandon Warmke and Michael McKenna, "Moral Responsibility, Forgiveness, and Conversation," in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 189-212; Warmke, "The Normative Significance of Forgiveness."

⁵ Piers Benn, "Forgiveness and Loyalty," *Philosophy* 71 (1996): 369-383, 374-5; Dana Nelkin, "Blame," in *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*, ed. Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, and Neil Levy (New York: Routledge, 2017), 600-11, 608; Paul Hughes, "Two Cheers for Forgiveness (and Even Fewer for Revenge)," *Philosophia* 44 (2016): 361-80, 364; Brandon Warmke, "God's Standing to Forgive," *Faith and Philosophy* 34 (2017): 381-402, 383 n. 5.

⁶ Glen Pettigrove, "The Standing to Forgive," *The Monist* 92 (2009): 583-603; Kevin Zaragoza, "Forgiveness and Standing," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84 (2012): 604-21.

⁷ Nelkin, "Blame," 608. Warmke also identifies this asymmetry in "God's Standing to Forgive," 383 n. 5.

⁸ Luke Russell, "The Who, the What, and the How of Forgiveness," *Philosophy Compass* 15 (2020): 1-9; Adam Piovarchy, "Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 101 (2020): 603-27.

⁹ James Edwards, "Standing to Hold Responsible," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 16 (2019): 437-62.

¹⁰ Matt King also discusses different notions of the standing to blame but is ultimately skeptical of the concept of standing altogether (Matt King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” in *Oxford Studies in Agency & Responsibility* 6, ed. David Shoemaker [New York: Oxford University Press, 2019], 265-88.)

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹² Neal Tognazzini and D. Justin Coates, “Blame,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2018 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/blame/>>.

¹³ Fritz and Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame”; Todd, “A Unified Account”.

¹⁴ See Macalester Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique,” in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal Tognazzini (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 263-81; Todd, “A Unified Account”.

¹⁵ McKiernan, “Standing Conditions and Blame”; Eva Dadlez, “Comment on ‘Standing Conditions and Blame’ by Amy McKiernan,” *Southwest Philosophy Review* 32 (2016): 49-52; Seim, “The Standing to Blame and Meddling”.

¹⁶ As we explain below, while we ultimately claim that the standing to blame just is a non-defeated right to blame (Fritz and Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame,” 125), we allow the disjunction to be more ecumenical. For our purposes here, nothing of substance hangs on this difference.

¹⁷ Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Stephen Darwall, “Authority and Reasons: Exclusionary and Second-Personal,” *Ethics* 120 (2010): 257-78; Joseph Raz, “On Respect, Authority, and Neutrality: A Response,” *Ethics* 120 (2010): 279-301; Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly”; Stefan Riedener, “The Standing to Blame, or Why Moral Disapproval Is What It Is,” *Dialectica* 73 (2019): 183-210.

¹⁸ John Sabini and Maury Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” 267.

²⁰ Hughes, however, claims that there is third-party legal standing (Hughes, “Two Cheers for Forgiveness,” 365).

²¹ Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” 278.

²² As mentioned in n. 1, Milic might deny that Zane successfully blames (see Milic, “Hypocritical Blame”). Yet if hypocrites couldn’t successfully blame others, it’s unclear how one could distinguish different types of hypocrites. For instance, Moliere’s *Tartuffe* does not genuinely care about the moral norms for which he chastises others. His blame is fake or hollow. Yet another hypocrite might genuinely care about some moral norm, but fail to realize that the norm applies to her or that she has violated it. Her blame is plausibly genuine. If there cannot be standingless

blame, it's difficult to distinguish between these two hypocrites, since on Milic's view, neither of them genuinely blames if they lack standing.

²³ Riedener, "The Standing to Blame"; Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsibly," 276.

²⁴ Raz, "On Respect, Authority, and Neutrality".

²⁵ D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, "The Nature and Ethics of Blame," *Philosophy Compass* 7 (2012): 197-207, 203, emphasis added.

²⁶ Cohen, "Casting the First Stone," 120.

²⁷ Fritz and Miller, "Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame," 125.

²⁸ Todd, "A Unified Account," 359.

²⁹ R. A. Duff, "Blame, Moral Standing, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Trial," *Ratio* 23 (2010): 123-40, 124; Wallace, "Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons," 317; Coates and Tognazzini, "The Nature and Ethics of Blame," 203; Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsibly," 281; Roadevin, "Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing," 137.

³⁰ Leif Wenar, "The Nature of Rights," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33 (2005): 223-52. Wenar refers to these as *elements*, but we refer to them as types of rights simply to clarify that each element falls into a different category.

³¹ Blame may sometimes be constituted simply by nonvoluntary states (e.g., beliefs, attitudes). Wenar offers an analysis of a right to ϕ (where ϕ is a belief or attitude) in terms of having no conclusive reason (of the relevant sort) not to ϕ (see Leif Wenar, "Epistemic Rights and Legal Rights," *Analysis* 63 (2003): 142-6.).

³² Wenar, "The Nature of Rights," 232.

³³ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁵ There are reasons to think of the privilege-right at issue as *pro tanto* in nature. (See Joel Feinberg, *Rights, Justice, and the Bounds of Liberty* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980]; Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990].) Thus, standingless blame is not necessarily impermissible. Instead, lack of standing provides a certain weighty kind of *pro tanto* reason against blaming, though other considerations could be serious enough to make blaming permissible or all-things-considered appropriate. To illustrate, given his role in inciting the violent riots at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, Donald Trump plausibly lacked the standing to blame the rioters. Yet given the consequences of not publicly condemning them, it was permissible for him to do so despite his

lack of standing. (See Kyle G. Fritz, “Hypocrisy, Inconsistency, and the Moral Standing of the State,” *Criminal Law and Philosophy* 13 [2019]: 309-27 for another example regarding blame and punishment.) This is to reject what King calls the Orthodox View, where “one can’t blame appropriately unless one has the requisite status (with the accompanying right, authority, or jurisdiction)” (King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” 267).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁸ We assume this is a mild wrongdoing, and not an instance of child abuse (which is plausibly everybody's business). For more on meddlesome blame, see McKiernan, “Standing Conditions and Blame”; Dadlez, “Comment on ‘Standing Conditions and Blame’”; Seim, “The Standing to Blame and Meddling”.

³⁹ King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” 273, emphasis original.

⁴⁰ Fritz and Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame”.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Fritz and Miller, “The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame”.

⁴² King is skeptical of the standing to blame altogether, and so provides additional arguments against standing as a privilege. We assume at the outset that the standing to blame and the standing to forgive are genuine phenomena. As a result, we cannot engage with King's skeptical arguments here.

⁴³ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*; Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible”; Piovarchy, “Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority”.

⁴⁴ Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 456.

⁴⁵ Friedman writes that “A promising way of thinking about moral standing to blame...is that it is the entitlement to have one’s blame heard and responded to by other members of the moral community” (Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” 281). This sounds like a claim-right, since the duty is on others to acknowledge and respond to the blame. King also interprets Friedman as advocating that the standing to blame is a claim-right (King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” 274). We have explained above why we think claim-rights, as passive rights, are of the wrong sort to associate with standing. But if standing is at least partly a power, it may *create* certain claim-rights on others. Indeed, this may be Friedman’s view. Earlier in her paper, Friedman writes that standing “should be defined directly as that status in virtue of which someone is entitled to blame another person for a particular sort of moral wrongdoing and have the blame taken seriously by other moral agents” (Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” 278). Contra King, this sounds less like a claim-right and more like a power-right

that creates certain claim-rights, which is consonant with Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible”. On this view, standing is not *itself* a claim-right, but rather a power-right that, when exercised, creates claim-rights on other members of the moral community.

⁴⁶ Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible,” 456.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁴⁸ Edwards notes that Darwall thinks that anyone has the standing to privately blame, though Edwards himself isn't clear about where he stands on the issue (*Ibid.*, 442, n. 21).

⁴⁹ King, “Skepticism About the Standing to Blame,” 275.

⁵⁰ Ori J. Herstein, “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons: Hypocrisy, Minding Your Own Business, and Knowing One’s Place,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 20 (2020): 1-18.

⁵¹ Hughes, “Two Cheers for Forgiveness,” 364.

⁵² Some theorists writing on forgiveness discuss the standing to forgive in terms of its being one’s position or place to forgive (Macalester Bell, “Forgiving Someone for Who They Are (and Not Just What They’ve Done),” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77 [2008]: 625-58, 654; Zaragoza, “Forgiveness and Standing,” 619; Margaret Urban Walker, “Third Parties and the Social Scaffolding of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41 [2013]: 495-512, 500; Maura Priest, “Blame After Forgiveness,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19 [2016]: 619-33, 619; Glen Pettigrove, “The Dilemma of Divine Forgiveness,” *Religious Studies* 44 [2008]: 457-64, 457). However, even these theorists often also discuss it in terms of rights (Walker, “Third Parties and the Social Scaffolding of Forgiveness,” 495-6; Priest, “Blame After Forgiveness,” 620, n. 1).

⁵³ Jeffrie G. Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7 (1982): 503-16, 506, emphasis original. Zaragoza attributes the application of the language of standing to forgive to Murphy (Zaragoza, “Forgiveness and Standing,” 613, n. 410). Warmke writes, “As far as I know, Jeffrie Murphy was the first to introduce ‘standing’ as a way of talking about who is a candidate for forgiving” (Warmke, “God’s Standing to Forgive,” 382, n. 3). Importantly, we are *not* concerned here with Murphy’s claim that only victims have the standing to forgive, but rather with the fact that Murphy (and theorists who follow him) understand the standing to forgive in terms of rights. Murphy later abandoned the view that only victims can forgive (Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Punishment and the Moral Emotions: Essays in Law, Morality, and Religion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], 185).

⁵⁴ Hughes, “Two Cheers for Forgiveness,” 365ff.

⁵⁵ Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” 511.

⁵⁶ J. Angelo Cortlett, “Forgiveness, Apology, and Retributive Punishment,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2006): 25-42, 37; Roman David and Susanne Y. P. Choi, “Forgiveness and Transitional Justice in the Czech Republic,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 (2006): 339-67, 340 n. 3; Walker, “Third Parties and the Social Scaffolding of Forgiveness,” 495-6.

⁵⁷ Priest, “Blame After Forgiveness,” 621; Christopher Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis: Forgiveness as a Normative Power,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 46 (2018): 207-33; Rosalind Chaplin, “Taking it Personally: Third Party Forgiveness, Close Relationships, and the Standing to Forgive,” in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics Volume 9*, ed. Mark Timmons (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 73-94, 77.

⁵⁸ Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis,” 217.

⁵⁹ This needn’t be the case. Bennett identifies the relevant authority in terms of a Hohfeldian power (Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis,” 216), writing that “forgiveness is primarily a normative rather than a psychological phenomenon, and involves the exercise of a power to create, waive or alter secondary obligations related to the wrongdoing” (ibid., 207). Bennett may maintain that the standing to forgive *just is* the right—a normative power—rather than a status that grants the right.

⁶⁰ The ability at issue is distinct from psychological ability. For example, a victim may have difficulty overcoming resentment with respect to a wrongdoer (or perhaps difficulty coming to utter words of forgiveness to the wrongdoer), and thus be psychologically incapable of forgiving.

⁶¹ Benn, “Forgiveness and Loyalty,” 374-5.

⁶² Hughes, “Two Cheers for Forgiveness,” 365, emphasis added.

⁶³ Warmke, “God’s Standing to Forgive,” 383, n. 5, emphasis added.

⁶⁴ Pettigrove, “The Standing to Forgive”.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 594, emphasis added.

⁶⁶ John Gingell, “Forgiveness and Power,” *Analysis* 34 (1974): 180-3; Margaret R. Holmgren, “Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 341-52; Robert C. Roberts, “Forgiveness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 289-306; David Novitz, “Forgiveness and Self-

Respect,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998): 299-315; Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd, “Forgiveness: The Victim’s Prerogative,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 21 (2002): 97-111.

⁶⁷ The tight relationship between standing and ability is perhaps the clearest respect in which the standing to forgive resembles legal standing, since the ability to bring a suit to court requires legal standing. This is an important respect in which the standing to forgive is analogous to legal standing but in which the standing to blame (we have argued) is not. Another way in which the standing to forgive *may* be analogous to legal standing is that victims have the exclusive standing to forgive, a position which is more controversial (see Pettigrove, “The Standing to Forgive”; Chaplin, “Taking it Personally”).

⁶⁸ Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness”; Warmke, “God’s Standing to Forgive”; Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis”.

⁶⁹ Warmke, “God’s Standing to Forgive,” 382.

⁷⁰ Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness,” 690.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 690-1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 690.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 698.

⁷⁴ Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis,” 207.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 207-8.

⁷⁶ Alice MacLachlan, “Moral Powers and Forgivable Evils,” in *Evil, Political Violence, and Forgiveness: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card*, ed. Andrea Veltman and Kathryn J. Norlock (New York: Lexington, 2009), 135-57, 140.

⁷⁷ Priest, “Blame After Forgiveness,” 621.

⁷⁸ Paul Twambley, “Mercy and Forgiveness,” *Analysis* 36 (1976): 84-90, 89.

⁷⁹ Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness,” 689-90; see also Dana Nelkin, “Freedom and Forgiveness,” in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Ishtiyaque Haji and Justin Caouette (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 165-88.

⁸⁰ Wallace, “Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons”; Fritz and Miller, “Hypocrisy and the Standing to Blame”; Fritz and Miller, “The Unique Badness of Hypocritical Blame”; Fritz and Miller, “When Hypocrisy Undermines the Standing to Blame”; Roadevin, “Hypocritical Blame, Fairness, and Standing”; Rossi,

“The Commitment Account of Hypocrisy”; Piovarchy, “Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority”.

⁸¹ See Benjamin Rossi, “Hypocrisy is Vicious, Value-Expressing Inconsistency,” *The Journal of Ethics* 25 (2021): 57-80.

⁸² Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness”; Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis”.

⁸³ Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness,” 688.

⁸⁴ Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel, in the Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Joseph Butler, D.C.L., Late Bishop of Durham*, ed. Samuel Halifax (New York: Carter, 1846); Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment”.

⁸⁵ Glen Pettigrove, “The Forgiveness We Speak: The Illocutionary Force of Forgiving,” *The Southwest Journal of Philosophy* 42 (2004): 371-92.

⁸⁶ On this view, the standing to forgive is an *enabling* condition for forgiveness itself. Instead, one could maintain (as Pettigrove assumes in “The Standing to Forgive”) that the conditions for the standing to forgive are built into the constitutive conditions on forgiveness itself. Thus, if forgiveness involves XYZ-ing, then anyone who is able to XYZ has the standing to forgive. For a discussion of these competing approaches, see Warmke, “God’s Standing to Forgive,” 395-6.

⁸⁷ Though rare, hypocritical blame may be permissible in marginal cases (see n. 35).

⁸⁸ Piovarchy, “Hypocrisy, Standing to Blame and Second-Personal Authority,” 606; see also Edwards, “Standing to Hold Responsible”.

⁸⁹ See Ori J. Herstein, “Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons,” *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017): 3109-32.

⁹⁰ Notice that the fact that the fulfillment of some function may be good doesn't suffice for it being a normative function in this sense.

⁹¹ Matthew Talbert, “Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest,” *The Journal of Ethics* 16 (2012): 89-109, 105.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹³ Angela Smith, “Moral Protest and Moral Blame,” in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, ed. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27-48, 43.

⁹⁴ Coleen Macnamara, “Blame, Communication, and Morally Responsible Agency,” in *The Nature of Moral Responsibility: New Essays*, ed. Randolph Clarke, Michael McKenna, and Angela Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 211-36, 222.

⁹⁵ Normative *functions* of blame are distinct from normative *upshots* of blame. Suppose that Zane hypocritically blames. This might create a *pro tanto* obligation for someone else to call him out on this. But this isn’t a normative function of his blame, since that’s not its aim.

⁹⁶ Herstein, “Understanding Standing”; Herstein, “Justifying Standing to Give Reasons”.

⁹⁷ Roberts, “Forgiveness,” 299.

⁹⁸ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*; Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment”.

⁹⁹ Hughes, “Two Cheers for Forgiveness”.

¹⁰⁰ Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, *Forgiveness* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 44.

¹⁰¹ Paul Hughes and Brandon Warmke, “Forgiveness,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2017 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/forgiveness/>>.

¹⁰² J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹⁰³ Hughes and Warmke, “Forgiveness,” cite Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) on this point.

¹⁰⁴ Hughes and Warmke, “Forgiveness”. For a parallel view according to which the performative act of apology can function to alter the norms between the victim and wrongdoer, see Jeffrey S. Helmreich, “The Apologetic Stance,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 43 (2015): 75-108.

¹⁰⁵ Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness,” 689.

¹⁰⁶ Twambley, “Mercy and Forgiveness”.

¹⁰⁷ Nelkin, “Freedom and Forgiveness”; Warmke, “The Normative Significance of Forgiveness”; Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis”.

¹⁰⁸ Nelkin, “Freedom and Forgiveness,” 175.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett, “The Alteration Thesis,” 218-9.

¹¹⁰ In certain scenarios, forgiveness may be appropriate where restoring a relationship may not be, since a continued relationship might threaten harm or abuse (see Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 59).

¹¹¹ This isn't to say that Emeko should pretend that the affair never happened, but merely that, if Kimiko has genuinely forgiven him, Emeko no longer has the same obligations that he previously had.

¹¹² Again, we restrict these claims about forgiveness to paradigmatic cases.

¹¹³ See Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1-25.

¹¹⁴ Benn, "Forgiveness and Loyalty," 374.